



As Schools are Concerned, Everything Old is New Again

By JANE LANE

Where to put all these students? It's a question as ancient as the first school built on Duxbury soil in 1715.

Since construction commenced on that one-room schoolhouse, 18-feet long by 15-feet wide at the corner of Harrison and Tremont streets, there has been a continual succession of renovations, additions and new construction to meet an ever-expanding population of Duxbury students.

Throughout the 19th century, the inventory of school buildings increased as a number of structures were built in various neighborhoods, including The Point School at the junction of Powder Point Avenue and King Caesar Road. That school, daringly situated atop a delicate salt marsh — (a noticeable lack of conservation bylaws in the 1800s) — was built on wooden stilts. Students actually reported fishing through knotholes in the floors during high tides.

The Partridge Academy was a major advancement in modern education when it was built in 1844 as a three-year private high school on land now occupied by Town Hall. In 1868 the school officially became the first Duxbury High School.

By 1900 there were 229 students in the Duxbury school system and in its annual report the school committee indicated its desire to enter the modern age by building a four-year high school.

Years before the new high school was completed, however, the school committee worried about the number of students packed into the Partridge building.

After a few fits and starts, town meeting of 1926 finally agreed to a plan, appropriating \$130,000 to build a school at a new location along Alden Street which would house grades 5 through 12. In the spirit of unity it was duly noted that "on a motion of Alfred Green it was voted that we make this a unanimous vote and that all go home friends."

Just when townspeople figured all was well, at least for a spell, Supt. Green made yet another dire prediction — this time regarding the elementary grades. "When viewing the housing situation in regard to the primary school children," Green wrote in 1928, "we are confronted with the fact that these younger children are not being given justice in regard to their health, comfort, and mental training. Several thousand dollars must be spent in repairing and modernizing equipment".

It was a mantra he would repeat for several years. In fact, the following year the superintendent strongly suggested that, in lieu of new construction, electric lights be installed at the Point School "so that on dark and stormy days there will not be danger of eye strain."

DEPRESSION DAYS

In the midst of the Depression, Duxbury's student enrollment continued to expand "as many families are finding it more agreeable to live in a smaller community during this trying period and they are staying with us for the winter months," the superintendent reported. Throughout the early 30s's, the student population continued to grow — perhaps the train was to blame? As Supt. Green stated in 1933, "Duxbury is within commuting distance of Boston. With the appearance of the newer type of trains that travel at enormous rates of speed, the traveling time may easily be reduced to one-half of what it is at present. If this happened," he questioned, "will it mean even more people in Duxbury?"

Apparently, the town took this warning to heart as the first of several school building committees was assembled to study the need for a new primary school. In the first report to the town in 1934 the committee argued against the continued practice of housing eight grades in the same building — an accepted procedure since the high school had opened seven years earlier. "The fifth and sixth grades are in the high school where they must mingle with children in some cases as much as 10 years older than they are," the building committee reported. "This is an unhealthy situation." The estimated price of a brick and mortar elementary school would be about \$60,000 and the building committee suggested it be located near the high school.

But this study committee was realistic about the economic hard times and suggested that any building plans be postponed at least a year. One year turned into several and in 1939 the superintendent of schools blamed increasing enrollment "for most of our problems." Finally, in 1940 a committee of seven was appointed to "procure preliminary plans and specifications toward the erection of a school building."

THE WAR'S EFFECT

First the Depression, then World War II: Duxbury and its school system felt the impact as much as any town in America. In 1942 Supt. Green wrote, "We must realize that much of our equipment cannot be replaced until the war is over. Much time and effort must be devoted to reconditioning and repairing that which we now have." The following year the superintendent wearily reported, "It is trite to say that the devastation of the war is not all on the battle fronts, but nevertheless there is no place in America where the blight of the present conflict is more seriously evident than in the schools." Male teachers were leaving their positions for mili-

tary duty; females were obliged to accept better-paying jobs in private industry. There were few qualified replacements. In addition, the superintendent noted, there was an acute shortage of material and labor to carry out sorely needed renovations to the schools. One temporary solution to the overcrowded conditions at the high school was to move the vacant Island Creek School to Alden Street for use as a modern home economics classroom.

In his inaugural report as superintendent, John Whitehead commented in 1945 that a new elementary school was a priority for the school system. The following year, in its annual report to the town, the school committee argued that "we cannot emphasize adequately the inadequacy of the SCHOOL PLANT."

The warnings continued. In 1947 the school committee reported that enrollment in the elementary grades was up ten percent, with all indications of a 13 percent increase the following year. It was the year of the Baby Boom after all, and the superintendent predicted that Duxbury's birth rate could follow the national trend and spike more than 50 percent.

After a few unsuccessful attempts voters in 1948 finally approved a proposal to spend \$270,000 for a new elementary school located southeast of the

high school.

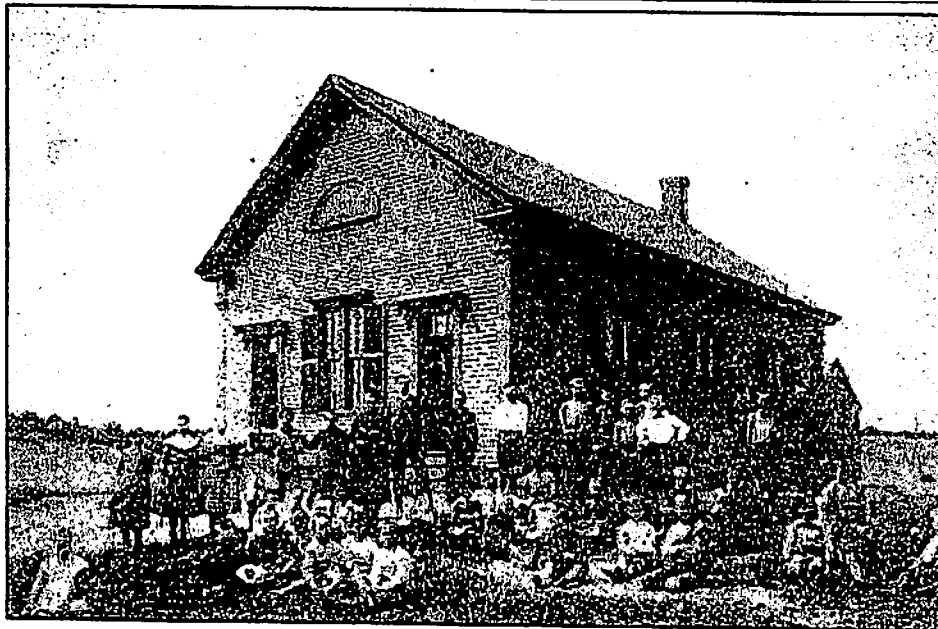
That same year, however, the superintendent was not convinced the status quo would suffice. "Next year," Whitehead warned, "the high school will be at or very close to capacity for which the building is designed." As if that news wasn't dire enough, he had the temerity to publicly state that enrollment in the elementary grades "will be very close to the capacity for which the new elementary school was designed." The new school was obsolete before it was occupied.

"Although there is no intention here to 'cry wolf' it is evident that some thinking and planning must be done now in order to meet the very acute problem that will be faced between 1950 - 60," Whitehead wrote.

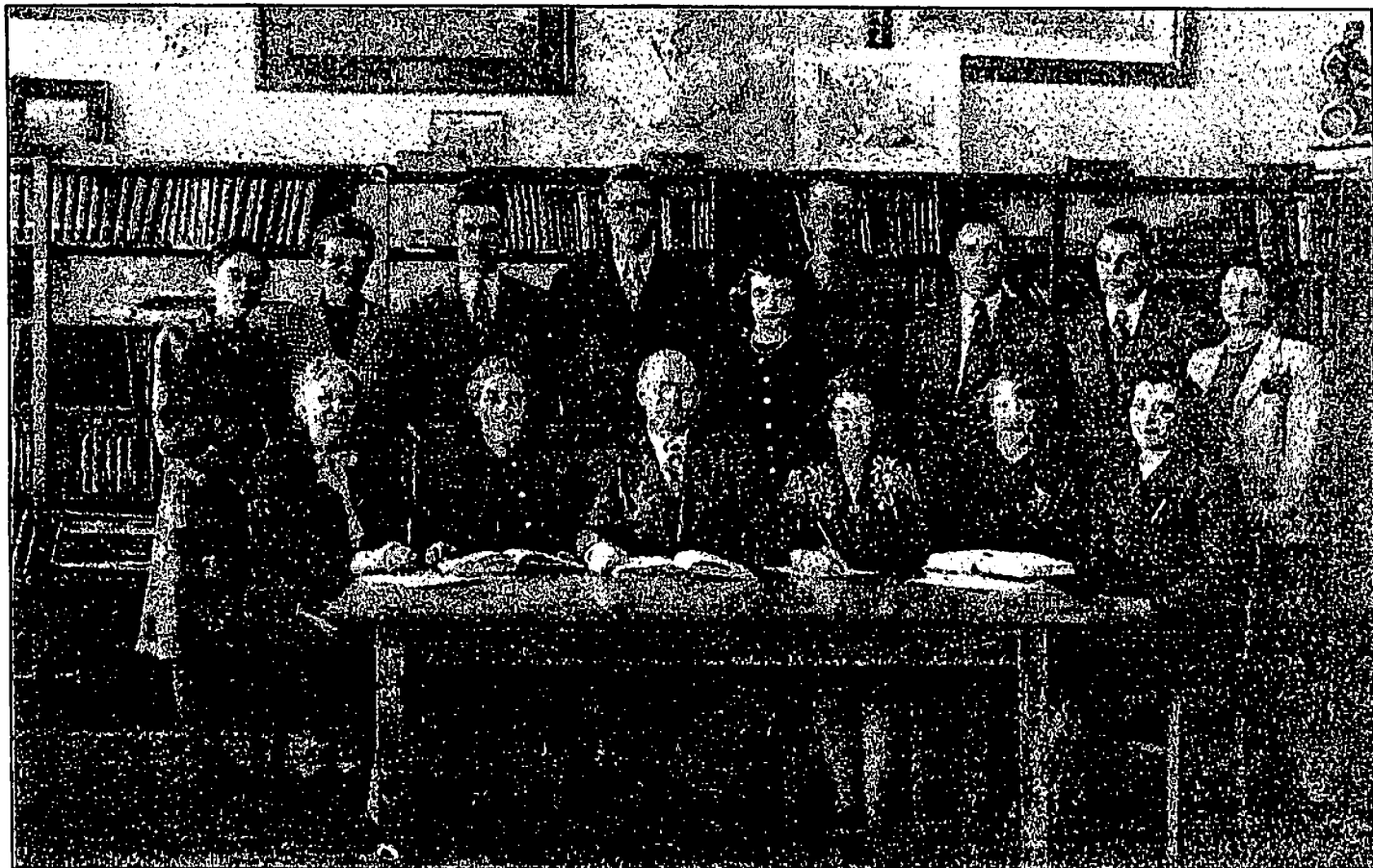
By the start of the Korean War the superintendent reported that additional elementary rooms would be needed by the start of school in 1952 or 1953. "Additional space may be needed almost immediately," he wrote in 1950, "if the war situation causes more families to move from cities to suburbs like Duxbury."

Once again town meeting decided to form a committee to "study elementary school building needs." By 1954, four classrooms at the high school were oc-

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The Millbrook School (c.1887) at the corner of Routes 14 and 3A was one of 12 district schools serving Duxbury students at the turn of the century.



The high school faculty photographed for the 1948 edition of the DHS yearbook, The Patridge.

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cupied by elementary students. The superintendent warned, "unless there is a building addition completed by that time (Sept., 1954) there will be no place to put classes moved out of the high school."

In 1953 town meeting voted to appropriate \$431,000 to construct and equip a 10-room addition to the elementary school. With construction of the new addition, the average class size would now be reduced to an all-time low of 26 students per classroom.

The following year a long-range school building committee was appointed with a charge to study the future need for a more spacious high school and an additional primary school. After studying the latest population projections, the committee predicted the high school would be at capacity by the end of the decade. The town's population would continue to climb, the committee noted, with the scheduled completion of the new state highway by 1960 or 61. It could not be over-emphasized, the school committee optimistically overstated in its annual report, that once Rte. 3 was completed, "Duxbury will then be 30 to 35 minutes from Boston by automobile" and thus become increasingly attractive to a new population of commuters.



Members of the Partridge Academy Class of 1910 posed for a formal class photo.

DECADE OF CHANGE

By 1957 the school committee proposed an ambitious plan that would include construction of a new high school for 600 students by 1960. The following year the committee decided that along with a new high school, a new elementary school would likely be necessary — perhaps in “another part of town” that was experiencing an influx of new residential development.

By the close of this decade of change, Supt. Everett Handy was equally worried about what students were studying and expressed his “great concern as to the adequacy of our school curriculum in an age of automation, great scientific advancement, space exploration, nuclear warfare and rapid communication. Perhaps at no previous period,” he stated, “has so much been written or said about education.”

As Duxbury entered the 1960s, construction began on a new \$1.4 million high school for grades seven through 12. It would be ready for occupancy the following year while four, five and six would be moved into the old high school building (Upper Alden), thus relieving some pressure on the elementary school. That facility, the school committee noted, would be adequate for grades K-3 for the next ten years, although the “actual effect of the new highway” on future student enrollment could not be predicted with any strong sense of accuracy.

The school committee toyed with the idea of constructing a second junior high, but it remained consistent in its support of an additional elementary school. By the mid-60s it was obvious that the junior-senior high school was at capacity — years earlier than originally thought and the elementary school was not far behind. Consequently the old high school building would be needed for grades seven and eight. Where to transfer grades four, five and six became an overwhelming concern at the time. The building committee sug-

gested that a middle school for grades five through eight should be constructed — but where? One possible site was a parcel of school-owned land on Chandler Street — far from the original school campus site but close to where new residents were building their homes.

In 1966, however, an alternate plan called for the construction of a middle school for 1,100 grade five through eight students on land across the street from the existing intermediate school. That building, which would be named the Eben Howes Ellison Middle School, was opened for business in 1967; the modern educational concept of “team teaching” would be prominently figured in its architectural design.

As the decade came to a close, it was evident the schools could never quite keep up with the town’s swelling population. The superintendent was convinced that a new primary school on the former Chandler Field site would be necessary by 1971, along with an addition to the middle school and high school. His concerns were validated by population projections supplied by the Boston-based Metropolitan Area Planning Council that predicted the town would grow to 17,600 residents by 1990. Even more alarming was a planning board consultant’s study that predicted a town-wide population of 18,300 by 1985.

In his last report as school superintendent, Dr. Handy declared that the most critical problem facing the Duxbury schools in the upcoming decade “is that of providing suitable spaces for our expanding school population.” schools.

POPULATION SWELLS

New Supt. Lawrence Anderson said in 1971 he would work closely with the now Permanent School Building Committee to develop plans to “house a school population now growing at 11 percent annually.” Just the previous year it had been necessary to house 200 Kindergarten students at the old Sailors’ Snug Harbor House on King Caesar Road — a practice that would continue until the Chandler School was built and ready for occupancy in 1973.

By the early 1970s it was evident to Dr. Anderson that “all schools are

crowded at this time." It should be noted that this ballooning student population was caused by immigration into the community rather than a spike in the local birth rate.

The Alden School with a capacity for 900 students now contained 914. The middle school with an 800-seat capacity was over by 53 students and the high school was bulging at the seams with 37 more students than its 600 limit. Discussions were taking place on whether a new middle school would be necessary, with thoughts of a temporary transition of the ninth grade into the middle school.

Double sessions at the high school became a hot topic of conversation, with serious consideration given to renovating the Upper primary school in 1973-74. Plans called for the Snug Harbor schoolhouse to be closed by the mid-70s along with the possibility of constructing yet another elementary school for the 2,109 pupils for grades K through five. In 1972 the school committee voted the following grade configurations: K through five at the elementary schools; six through eight at the middle school and nine through 12 at the high school. It was decided that beginning in September 1973, the middle and high school would swap buildings, with the idea that the high school building would house approximately 690 students in grades six, seven and eight. The middle school would contain 788 students in grades nine through 12. With great fanfare and publicity and seemingly little disruption, the swap was accomplished in June 1973. The students and staff never looked back. The following September the Chandler School opened and the Upper Primary School renovations began. Still, the school administration worried about their continually expanding elementary student population.

Supt. Anderson wrote, "A school building is much like a home. There are yearly repairs to be made, and if they ignored, for a period time, the result is considerable expense all at once."

As the 70s advanced the nation's economy plummeted. In his annual report to the town, Supt. Anderson felt compelled to report that Massachusetts now ranked 50th in its financial support

of public schools, despite being eighth in per capita income. This was not good news for Duxbury where Anderson had calculated that for every new home built here 1.6 school-aged children and .62 pre-school children came along with it. He continued to predict that "in the distant future" another elementary school would be necessary in northwest Duxbury, along with a second intermediate school for grades six through eight.

The following year, however, the superintendent reversed his tracks and reported that enrollment was continuing to grow "but at a vastly slower rate than previously."

By the end of the decade, the school administration believed the population had at least temporarily stabilized and that no new buildings would be necessary "until well into the 80s." As the schools entered the new decade an unforeseen drop in student enrollment actually caused school territories to be re-districted and the teaching staff to be reduced.

The 1980s, and specifically 1981, will forever be known in municipal circles as the era of Proposition 2 1/2. The school administration would spend a great deal of its time and energy on compliance with the new legislation which limited annual tax base increases to two and one-half percent. By the mid-80s, new Superintendent Donald Kennedy, understanding the current building inventory would satisfy student needs for at least the next ten years, enacted a long-range building renovation project. For the next few years, in fact, the incoming freshman class at DHS would be smaller than the graduating class - although the five year-olds were streaming into school in record numbers. School administrators took this as an omen that stability would not last and building construction would resume by the late 1990s.

First, however, budgetary constraints forced some creative thinking on the part of the school administration. The seventh and eighth grades were transferred to the high school, (Lower) Alden was closed and students in grades Pre-K through two were shifted to the Chandler. The newly renamed Duxbury Elementary School, for the duration of its remaining years as a public school, housed grades three through six.

An expected increase in the secondary student enrollment caused another major grade reorganization in the late 90s, this time under the direction of new Supt. Eileen Williams. The lower Alden School was renovated and reopened for grades three and four; Chandler was now to be used for grades Pre-K through two; DMS would accommodate grades five through eight and the high school would include grades nine through 12 along with the Magic Dragon program.

There have been dramatic changes in Duxbury's educational system, yet history tells a repetitive story. Latest enrollment projections, now founded in more credible and scientific data, along with preferred changes in class size and curriculum, forecast a need for renewed school construction and rehabilitation. As long as there are students in need of schools, this is surely an epic without an ending.